

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

for

FY 01 YOUNG STAND PRUNING
(OR-110-01- 033)

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT
MEDFORD DISTRICT
GRANTS PASS RESOURCE AREA

July 2001

Dear Reader:

We appreciate your interest in the BLM's public land management activities. We also appreciate your taking the time to review this environmental assessment (EA). If you would like to provide us with written comments regarding this project or EA, please send them to me at 3040 Biddle Road, Medford, OR 97504 or email them to *or110mb@or.blm.gov*.

If confidentiality is of concern to you, please be aware that comments, including names and addresses of respondents, will be available for public review or may be held in a file available for public inspection and review. Individual respondents may request confidentiality. If you wish to withhold your name or street address from public review or from disclosure under the Freedom of Information Act, you must state this clearly at the beginning of your written comment. Such requests will be honored to the extent allowed by law. All submissions from organizations or officials of organizations or businesses will be made available for public inspection in their entirety.

Abbie Jossie
Field Manager
Grants Pass Resource Area

UNITED STATES
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT
MEDFORD DISTRICT

EA COVER SHEET

RESOURCE AREA: Grants Pass FY & REPORT # EA Number OR-110-00-033

ACTION/TITLE: FY 01 - Young Stand Pruning

LOCATION: Grants Pass Resource Area

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GRANTS PASS RESOURCE AREA
ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

FY 01 - Young Stand Pruning

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Chapter 1

Purpose and Need for Action and Alternatives

A. Introduction and Need for the Proposal

1. Introduction

The purpose of this environmental assessment (EA) is to assist in the decision-making process by assessing the environmental and human affects resulting from implementing the proposed project and/or alternatives. The EA will also assist in determining if an environmental impact statement (EIS) needs to be prepared or if a finding of no significant impact (FONSI) is appropriate.

This EA tiers to the following documents:

- (1) the Final EIS and Record of Decision dated June 1995 for the Medford District Resource Management Plan dated October 1994 (RMP);
- (2) the Final Supplemental EIS on Management of Habitat for Late-Successional and Old-Growth Forest Related Species Within the Range of the Northern Spotted Owl dated February 1994;
- (3) the Record of Decision for Amendments to Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management Planning Documents Within the Range of the Northern Spotted Owl and its Attachment A entitled the Standards and Guidelines for Management of Habitat for Late-Successional and Old-Growth Forest Related Species Within the Range of the Northern Spotted Owl dated April 13, 1994 (NFP); and
- (4) Record of Decision and Standards and Guidelines for Amendments to the Survey and Manager, Protection Buffer, and other Mitigation Measures Standards and Guidelines dated January 2001.

2. Purpose of and Need for the Proposed Action

The RMP (p.183) directs the implementation of silvicultural practices that result in array of conditions, including timber production. Pruning is directed at improving wood quality: the production of clear wood. It increases wood quality through the production of clear wood on rotations shorter than would be required without the action (RMP, p. 185)

B. Scoping Issues Relevant to the Proposal

No significant planning issues were identified during internal scoping by the interdisciplinary team.

C. Project Location

The location of the project areas are shown on Maps located in the Appendix.

D. Proposed Action and/or Alternatives

1. Alternative 1: No Action Alternative

In this EA document the "no-action" alternative is defined as not implementing any aspect of the proposed action alternative(s). Defined this way, the no action alternative also serves as a baseline or reference point for evaluating the environmental effects of the action alternatives. Inclusion of this alternative is done without regard to whether or not it is consistent with the Medford District RMP.

It should be pointed out that the no action alternative is not a "static" alternative. Implicit in it is a continuation of the environmental conditions and trends that currently exist or are occurring within the project area. This would include trends such as vegetation succession and consequent wildlife habitat changes, road condition / deterioration, rates of erosion, disease spread, continuation of current road densities, trends in fire hazard changes, OHV use, etc.

2. Alternative 2: Proposed Action - Pruning

The proposed action is to prune selected conifers (disease-free sugar pine, Douglas-fir, or ponderosa pine) trees in previously precommercially thinned stands as shown on the attached maps (Appendix A). Pruning would be done on ten (10) units for a total of 253 acres. The resultant spacing of pruned trees will be approximately 20' x 20'. The range of tree diameters which will be pruned is from three (3) to twelve (12) inches DBH selected from the healthiest and best well formed trees. Trees will be pruned to height of approximately 9 feet or 18 feet but not more than one half the total tree height, whichever is less. Live and dead branches, lateral sprouts and epicormic branches will be pruned. Pruning will be done with hand tools: pole saws, pole pruners, loppers, and pruning knives. Limbs will be pruned to within ½" of the stem but outside the branch collar. Power tools will not be used for the primary activity of pruning.

No pruning will occur within the riparian reserves for any stream classes 1-4 as shown on attached unit maps.

Slash resulting from pruning will be left on the forest floor. Due to the limited amount of slash which will be created from this action, no additional slash treatment (e.g., hand piling or pile burning) is anticipated. However, all units will have a post-treatment survey for hazardous fuel assessment. If slash created from the treatments creates an unacceptably high hazardous condition, the unit or portions of the units would have slash hand piled and piles burned. Prioritization for treatment is based on hazard and risk priorities. The areas selected for hazard reduction treatment are critical points on the sites such as where the highest potential loss would be experienced if a wildfire occurred, or along areas where a high risk of an ignition source would be present (e.g., along heavily used roads). Maximum pile size would be approximately 5' in diameter by 6' in height. All piles will be covered with a 5' x 5' sheet of 4-mil polyethylene plastic. At least ¾ of the pile's surface would be covered and the plastic anchored to preserve a dry ignition point. Slash piles will not be placed on logs, stumps, talus slopes, in roadways or drainage ditches. Piles will not be closer than 10' to pruned trees or 25' to a unit boundary.

Ignition of piles will be with drip torches or other hand held devices. Burning would be done in the

fall/winter season after significant rainfall has occurred. A prescribed burn plan would be prepared to address burning objectives and operational concerns. Prescribed burn plans include weather parameters and design features to diminish any potential of fire escape.

3. Project Design Features

Project design features (PDFs) are included for the purpose of reducing anticipated adverse environmental impacts identified in the scoping process and which might stem from the implementation of the proposed action or alternatives. This section outlines these PDFs.

1. Air Quality / Smoke Management

To conform with air quality standards and guidelines, all prescribed burning would be managed in a manner consistent with the requirements of the Oregon Smoke Management Plan and the Department of Environmental Quality's Air Quality and Visibility Protection Program. When burn units are adjacent to rural residential areas, burning would be timed to minimize the amount of residual smoke. This can be accomplished by burning when conditions for smoke dispersal are optimal such as during rainy days and periods when atmospheric instability is present.

Patrol and mop-up of burned piles would occur when needed to prevent burned areas from reburning or becoming an escaped fire.

Chapter 2

Environmental Consequences

A. Introduction

Only substantive site-specific environmental changes that would result from implementing the proposed action or alternatives are discussed in this chapter. If an ecological component is not discussed, it should be assumed that the resource specialists have considered affects to that component and found the proposed action or alternatives would have minimal or no affects. Similarly, unless addressed specifically, the following were found not to be affected by the proposed action or alternatives: air quality; areas of critical environmental concern (ACEC); cultural or historical resources; Native American religious sites; prime or unique farmlands; Flood plains; endangered, threatened or sensitive plant, animal or fish species; water quality; wetlands/riparian zones; wild and scenic rivers; and wilderness areas. In addition, hazardous waste or materials are not directly involved in the proposed action or alternatives.

B. Site Specific and Cumulative Effects of the Alternatives

1. Silvicultural/ Wood quality

a. Alternative 1 - No Action

The stand will continue on its present growth rate trajectory. Pruning would occur naturally at some point in the future as the trees grow. The wood quality grown until that time would be knotty.

b. Alternative 2 - Proposed Action

This action will result in producing wood with tight knots or clear of knots. This is essential for production of clear wood with grades above "common" under normal, evenaged rotations for Douglas-fir (RMP-pg 185).

For healthy sugar pine trees which are pruned, there is a beneficial effect to removing the lower branches since the lower branches are those which are first inoculated with the spores of white pine blister rust from *Ribes* plants. These inoculation centers later spread to infect the entire tree.

2. Wildlife

Although a range of species may utilize the areas proposed for pruning, there are none that are considered exclusively dependent on this age class. Consequently, the potential impacts are reduced. This discussion will focus on potential impacts on T&E and survey and manage species.

a. Affected Environment

The areas proposed for pruning include stands that are generally less than 30 years old. Stands less than 30 years old do not provide nesting habitat for spotted owls, marbled murrelets, or bald eagles. Bald eagles and spotted owls may occasionally use young stands for foraging. This foraging is most likely associated with edges where adjacent large trees provide perching opportunities and cover.

Three units are proposed for pruning within marbled murrelet zone 2 (35-50 miles inland). However, there have been no marbled murrelet detections within this zone in the basin and the probability of their occurrence is very low. The stands proposed for pruning are not considered suitable marbled murrelet nesting habitat.

Survey and manage molluscs with potentially suitable habitat in the project area include *Monadenia chaceana* and *Helminthoglypta hertlieni*. These molluscs are strongly associated with talus and rock outcrops. Coarse woody debris is also an important habitat component for these species. Red tree voles are associated with mature Douglas fir stands with high canopy closure (>50%). Stands within the project area are not representative of suitable red tree vole habitat.

b. Environmental Consequences

1) Alternative 1: No Action

Typically, young trees undergo a natural process of self pruning. As trees mature, they lose their lower branches through natural processes. Observations indicate that these stands have already begun this process. Over time, the lower branches will die and fall to the ground where they contribute to ground cover.

For spotted owls, foraging and nesting habitat suitability is expected to improve as these stands mature. In general, young stands do not represent preferred foraging habitat and when utilized, foraging is typically confined to the edges.

For marbled murrelets, young stands do not provide suitable nesting habitat. As these stands mature, their suitability as nesting habitat would improve.

For bald eagles, there are no known nests within ½ mile of the proposed activities. Additionally, these young stands do not provide preferred foraging habitat for bald eagles. As these stands mature, their suitability as nesting habitat would improve.

2) Alternative 2: Proposed Action

In general, the proposal will accelerate the pruning process already underway. Over time, stands undergo a natural process of self-pruning. As trees mature, they lose their lower branches through natural processes. Observations indicate that these stands have already begun this process.

Pruning, whether mechanical or natural, may result in reduced humidity and increased temperature. However, this shift in temperature and humidity could be offset by increased shrub density resulting from the increased sunlight reaching the understory. Additionally, because not every tree is pruned, these potential impacts are reduced.

Many species of wildlife are influenced by the complexity of the vertical structure of a stand. In general, vertical complexity contributes to more diverse species composition, particularly neotropical migrants. On the other hand, very dense stands can reduce the usefulness of habitat to wildlife by eliminating or reducing valuable shrub and forb vegetation and impacting accessibility.

Basal area will not be reduced as result of this project. However, the reduction of vertical structure may temporarily impact the suitability of habitat for species that are closely tied to the lower branches of trees. Because the pruning is scheduled for young stands (25-35 years old), the potentially affected species would not likely include those associated with mature or old growth habitat. Also, the long term ability of the stand to attain the desired vertical structure associated with mature forests would not be impacted by the pruning treatments.

For spotted owls, pruning will not have broad implications for the suitability of foraging habitat. This is based primarily on the fact that 1) young stands do not generally represent preferred foraging habitat and, 2) in young stands, foraging by spotted owls is typically confined to the edges. Additionally, as these stands mature, they will continue to develop conditions that contribute to improved foraging suitability.

For marbled murrelets, young stands do not provide suitable nesting habitat. Pruning treatments will not impact the ability of these trees to achieve suitable nesting habitat over the long term as these stands mature. Based on this, pruning treatments are not anticipated to result in impacts to the marbled murrelet. Additionally, the areas proposed for pruning are located where the probability of murrelets is very low.

For bald eagles, there are no known nests within ½ mile of the proposed activities. Additionally, these young stands do not provide preferred foraging habitat. Pruning treatments will not impact the ability of these trees to achieve suitable nesting habitat as these stands mature. Based on this, there are no anticipated impacts to the bald eagle.

For red tree voles and survey and manage molluscs, there are no anticipated direct impacts. Since the sites are not considered suitable RTV habitat, no impacts to RTVs are anticipated. For mollusc, there is no ground disturbance and no anticipated impact to important site features such as coarse woody debris and rock outcrops.

3. Fisheries

a. Alternative 1 - No Action

Allowing the trees in the upland to prune naturally will have no identifiable effect on T&E listed fisheries or the aquatic systems.

b. Alternative 2 - Proposed Action

Fish will not be adversely or beneficially affected because no pruning is proposed within the riparian reserves. Thus the action will have no impact on the aquatic environment. This action will not create conditions that will retard or prevent the attainment of ACS objectives.

4. Soils and Water

a. Alternative 1 - No Action

Natural pruning will occur over the long term resulting in a slow release of nutrients held in the foliage and branches.

b. Alternative 2 - Proposed Action

The proposed action will not have any adverse effect on soils. It will result in somewhat accelerated rate of organic material deposition on the forest floor from that of the no action alternative. The organic matter (cut slash) being left on the forest floor will enrich the soil in the long term as decomposition process releases nutrients into the soil. There may be some short term (very localized) beneficial effect from added protection to mineral soil provided by the slash. No cumulative effects of concern are identified. This alternative will not create conditions that will retard or prevent the attainment of ACS objectives.

5. Botany

a. Affected Environment

The proposed treatment is not considered to be ground disturbing, therefore the treatment units have not been surveyed for vascular or non-vascular special status or survey and manage plants. The pruning treatment proposed will only occur on lower branches which are not special status or survey and manage plant habitat. The main portion of canopy will be maintained and tree boles will not be disturbed.

b. Alternative 1 - No Action

Since no special status or survey and manage plant habitat exists for this treatment, the no action alternative would have no effect. The no action alternative would not create special status or survey and manage habitat.

c. Alternative 2 - Proposed Action

The trees being pruned are not late successional and their upper canopies will remain intact, therefore the likelihood of affecting special status or survey and manage plants is extremely low. The action will not affect any T&E plants or habitat. Because the upper canopy is being left intact and tree growth will improve from this treatment, future shading or substrate for the re-establishment of native vascular and non-vascular species could be a positive effect of this treatment.

6. Fuels and Fire

a. Alternative 1 - No Action

Fire hazard and risk of a stand replacement wildfire would continue to increase due the presence of

fuel ladders closer to the ground.

b. Alternative 2 - Proposed Action

This action could have both positive and negative effects on fuel hazard. Due to the limited amount of slash which will be created and left on the ground, it could have a slight effect of increasing the fire risk for a short time. For the long term, however, this action will help to reduce the fuel ladder on treated trees, and reduce the risk of adverse wildfire effects (i.e. tree mortality).

Chapter 3

Agencies and Persons Consulted

A. Public Involvement

No formal public scoping or comment period is planned due to the small nature of the project. A notice of decision will be published in the local newspaper upon completion of the Decision Record.

B. Availability of Document and Comment Procedures

Copies of the EA document will be available in the BLM Medford District Office and on the Medford District's web site.

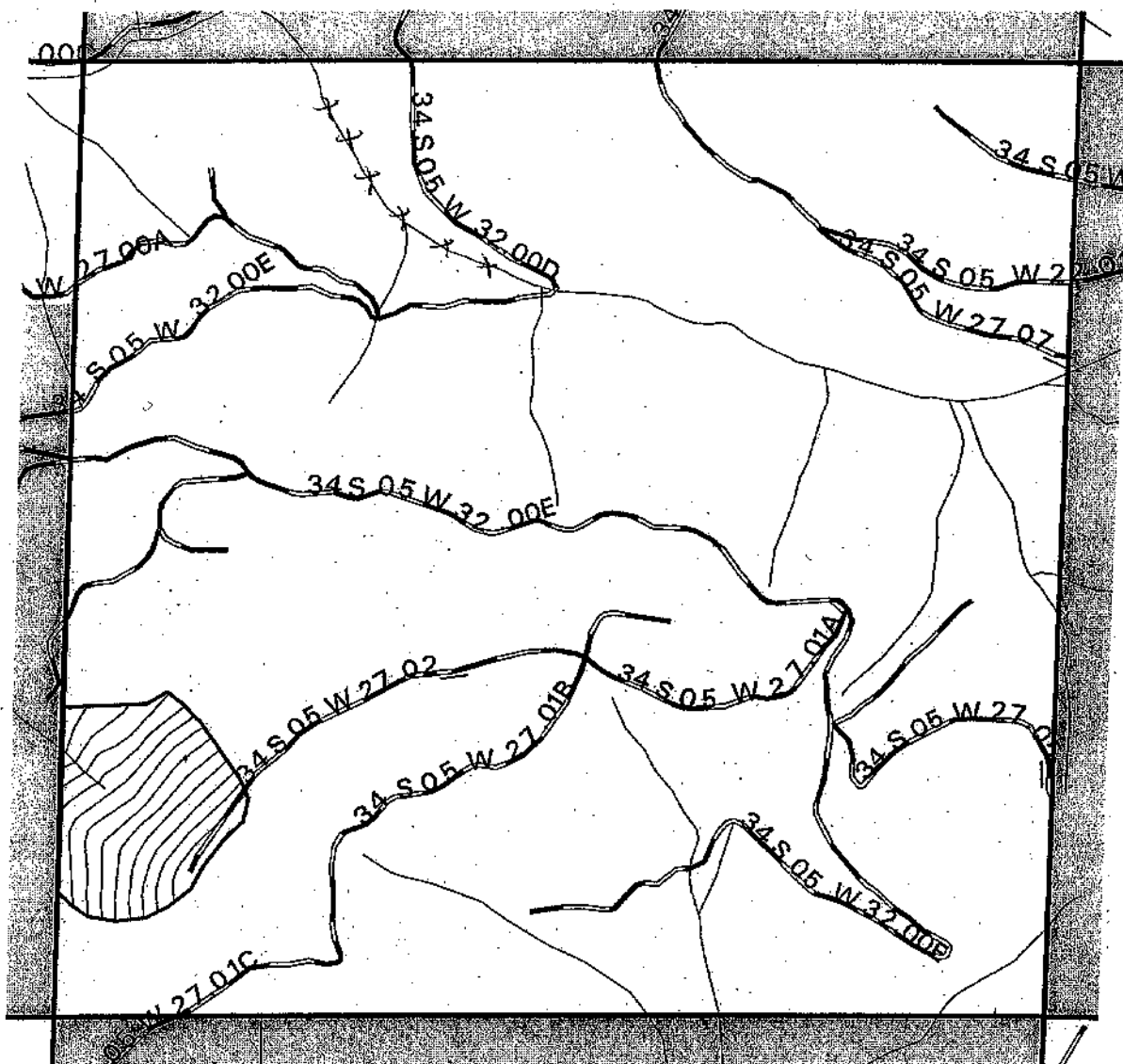
Table 1 - List of Pruning Units
FY01 - CE #OR110-01 - 033

Proposed Treatment	Key #	Legal	Land Allocation	Unit Name	Acres included within Riparian Reserve	Acres outside Riparian Reserve	Stand age	Last fuel loading treatment	Within 1/4 mile of owl core.	Ripar. Class (I-IV)	5 th field Watershed
PRUNING	113853	34S-05W-27-010	Matrix	Robert's Mountain 2	0	27	30	Pct'ed '92	-----	-----	Jumpoff Joe
PRUNING	110256	34S-05W-27-009	Matrix	Robert's Mountain 3	5	35	30	Pct'ed '92 HP/brn 16 ac. '98	-----	III	Jumpoff Joe
PRUNING	113851	34S-05W-27-006	Matrix	Robert's Mountain 4	13	20	30	Pct'ed	-----	III & IV	Jumpoff Joe
PRUNING	113852	34S-07W-27-007	Matrix	Robert's Mountain	0	32	30	HP/brn - 5 ac. '99	-----	-----	Jumpoff Joe
PRUNING	113971	35S-05W-35-002	Matrix	Louse Creek 1	4	18	20	Pct'ed - '90	-----	II	Jumpoff Joe
PRUNING	113073	35S-05W-35-013	Matrix	Louse Creek	1	20	30	Pct'ed '98 Hp/Brn 12 ac. '99	-----	IV	Jumpoff Joe
PRUNING	113975	35S-05W-35-007	Matrix	Louse Creek	0	32	30	Pct'ed '97	-----	-----	Jumpoff Joe
PRUNING	113310	38S-07W-21-004	Matrix	Tall Timber 21-9	2	10	20	Pct'ed '93	-----	IV	Deer Creek
PRUNING	113311	38S-07W-21-006	Matrix	Brass Monkey 7	6	15	20	Pct'ed '95	-----	IV	Deer Creek
PRUNING	113493	39S-07W-03-007	Matrix	Thompson Creek	0	44	35	Pct'ed '97	-----	-----	Deer Creek
				Total Acres	31	253					

Unit Map List

Map 1.	Robert's Mountain 2
Map 2.	Robert's Mountain 3
Map 3.	Robert's Mountain 4
Map 4.	Robert's Mountain
Map 5.	Louse Creek 1
Map 6.	Louse Creek
Map 7.	Louse Creek
Map 8.	Tall Timber 21-9
Map 9.	Brass Monkey 7
Map10.	Thompson Creek

T34S-R5W-S27



LEGEND



NON BLM LANDS



TREATMENT AREA WITH
40' CONTOUR INTERVAL

— STREAMS

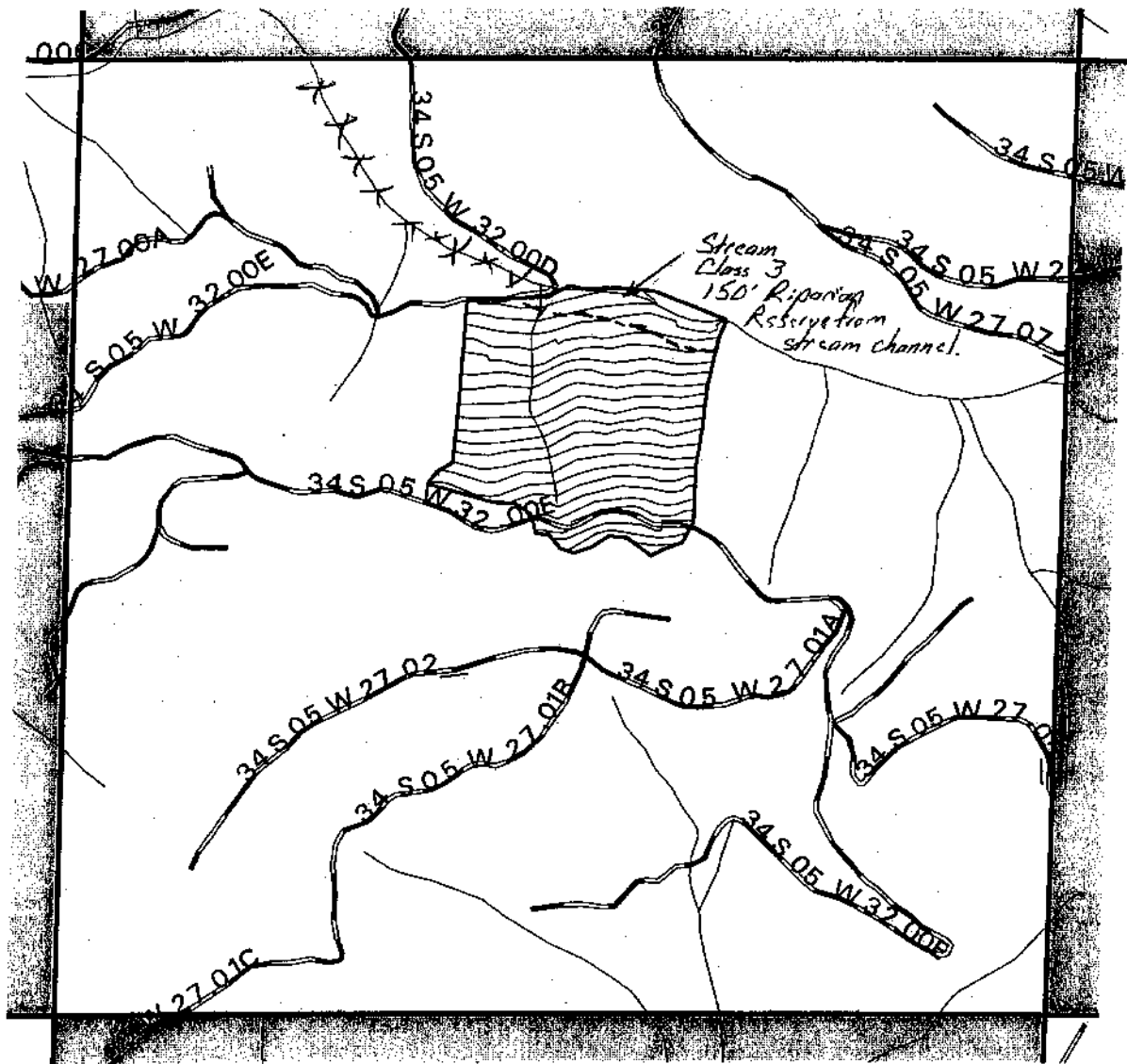
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— ROADS

UNIT NAME	Robert's Mountain 2
BID ITEM	
ACRES	27
KEY #	113853
OI #	27-10

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GRANTS PASS RESOURCE AREA Pruning	
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APPROVED	_____
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TREATMENT AREA WITH
40' CONTOUR INTERVAL

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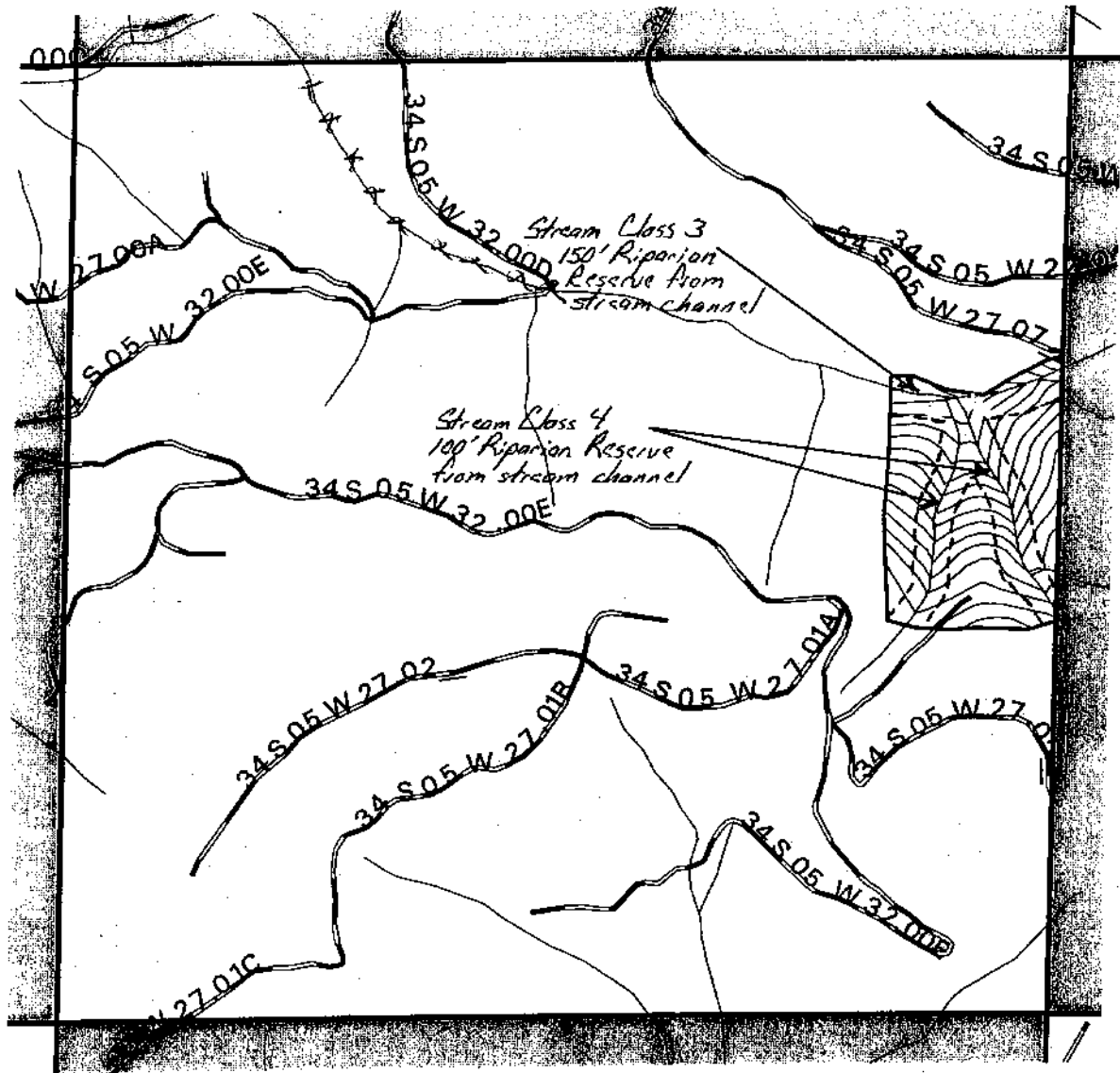
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UNIT NAME	Robert's Mountain 3
BID ITEM	
ACRES	40 (5 AC in RR)
KEY #	110256
OI #	27-9

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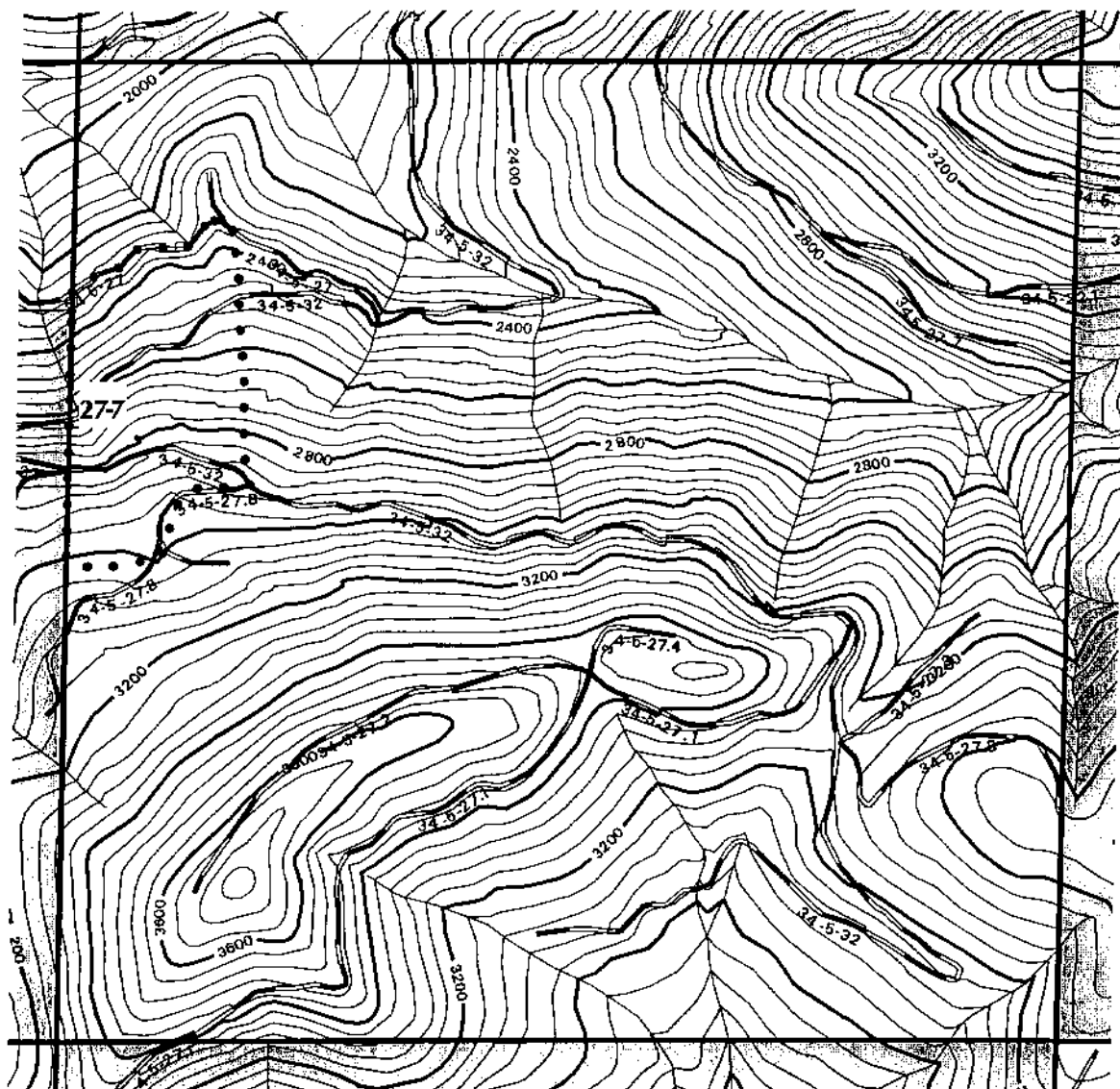


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-  TREATMENT AREA WITH 40' CONTOUR INTERVAL
-  STREAMS
-  SECTION LINE
-  ROADS

UNIT NAME	Robert's Mountain 4
BID ITEM	
ACRES	33 (13.4K in RR)
KEY #	113851
OI #	27-6

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 ——— STREAMS
 ——— SECTION LINE
 == ROADS

UNIT NAME	Robert's Mountain (007)
BID ITEM	
ACRES	32
KEY #	113852
OI #	27-7

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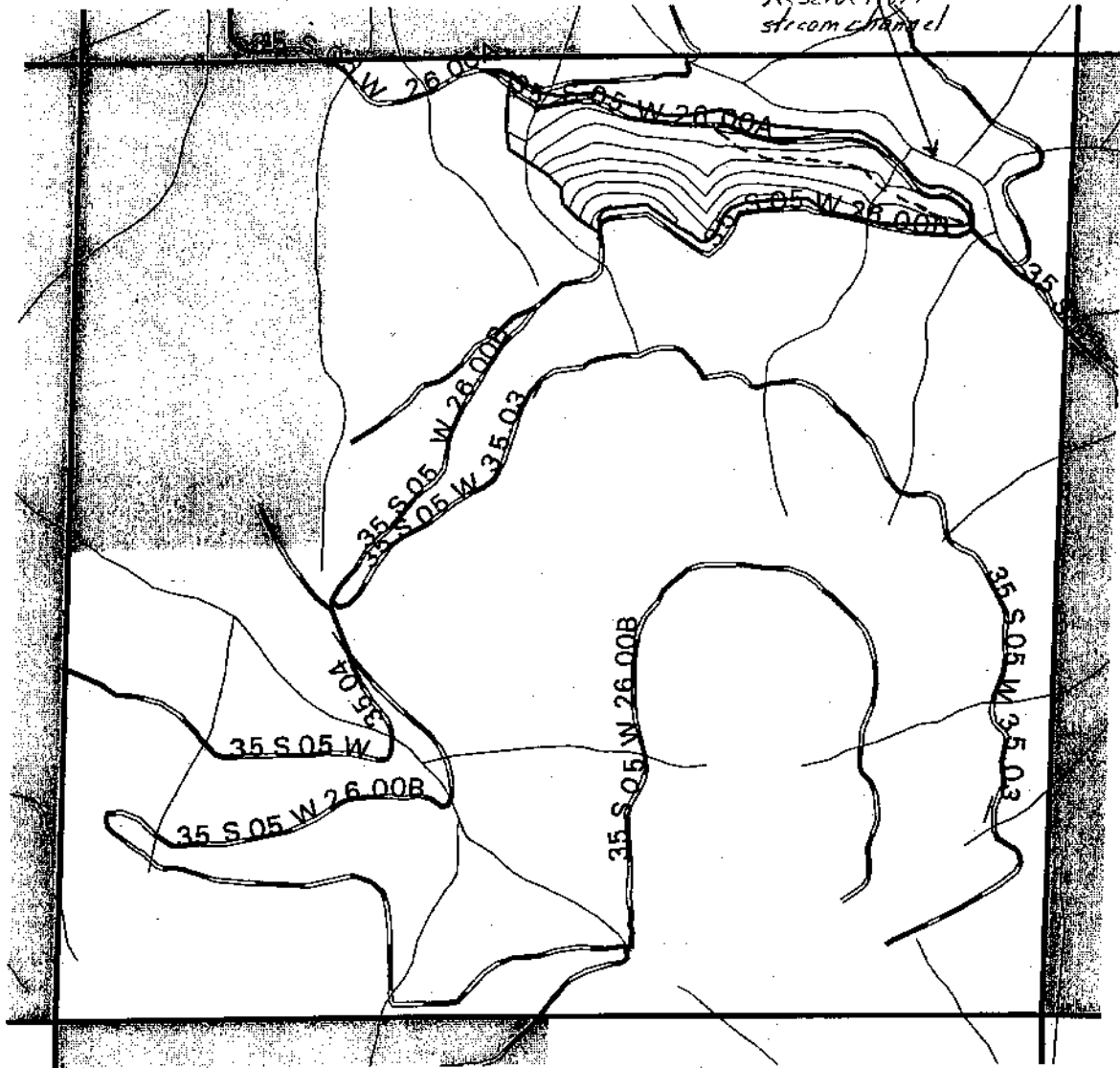
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T35S-R5W-S35

Stream class 2
300' Riparian
Reserve from
stream channel



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TREATMENT AREA WITH
40' CONTOUR INTERVAL

STREAMS

SECTION LINE

ROADS

UNIT NAME	Louse Creek 1
BID ITEM	
ACRES	22 (4 ac in RR)
KEY #	113971
OI #	35-2

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GRANTS PASS RESOURCE AREA

Pruning

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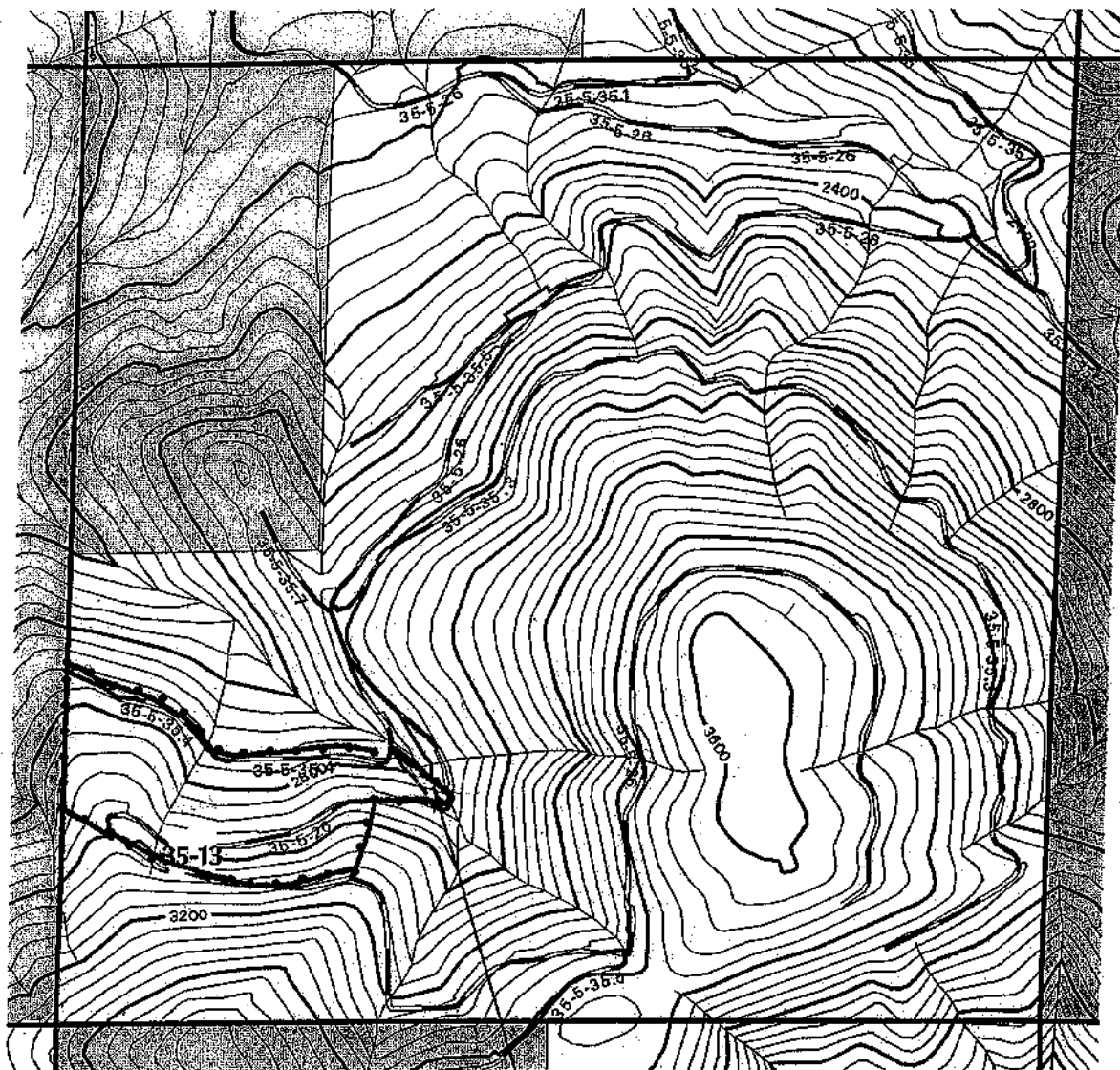
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NON BLM LANDS



TREATMENT AREA



STREAMS



SECTION LINE



ROADS

*Stream Class 4
100' Riparian Reserve
from stream channel*

UNIT NAME	Louse Cr.
BID ITEM	1
ACRES	21 (1 AC in RR)
KEY #	113073
OI #	35-13

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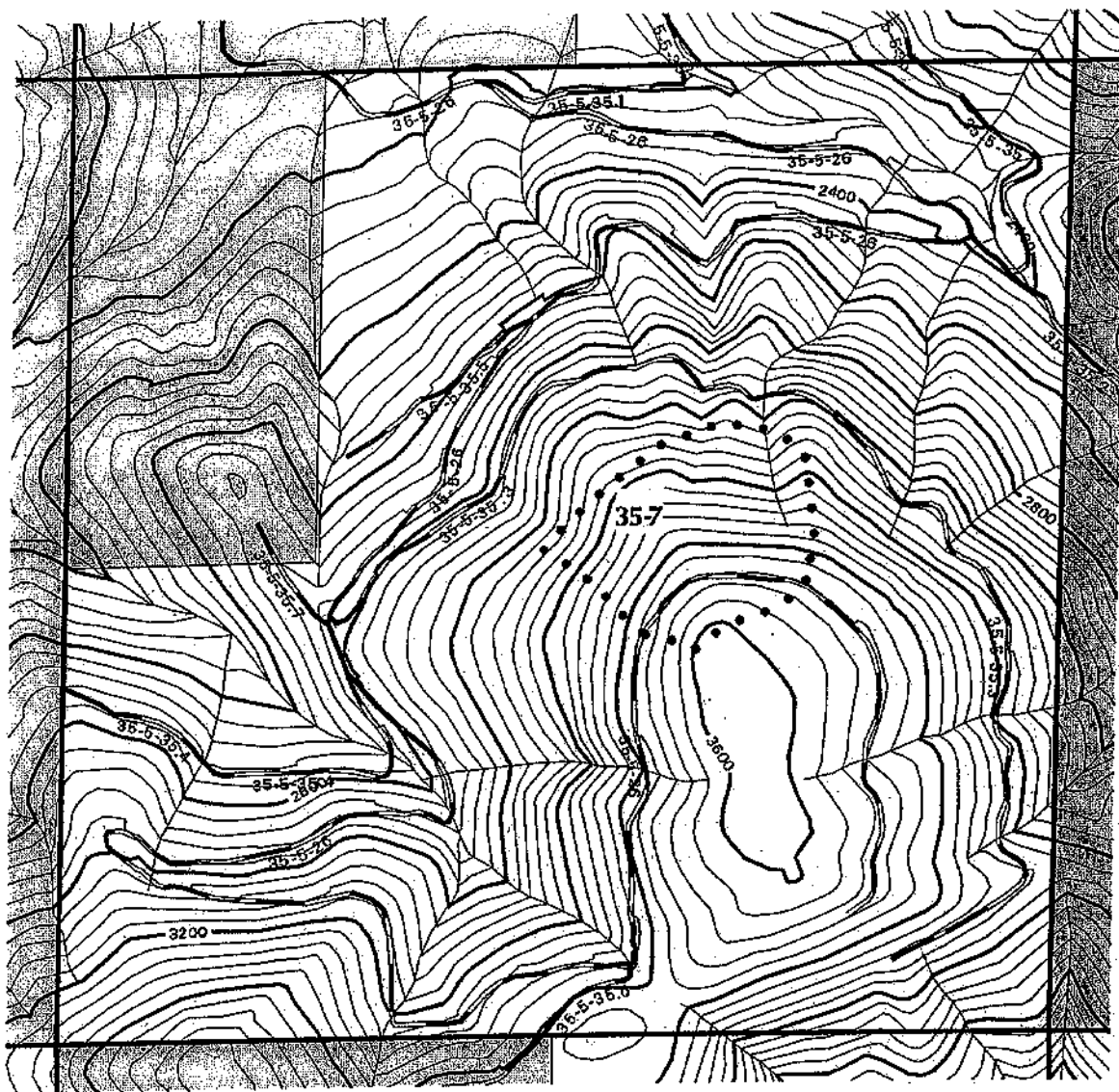
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UNIT NAME	Louse Cr.
BID ITEM	1
ACRES	32
KEY #	113975
OI #	35-7

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Pruning

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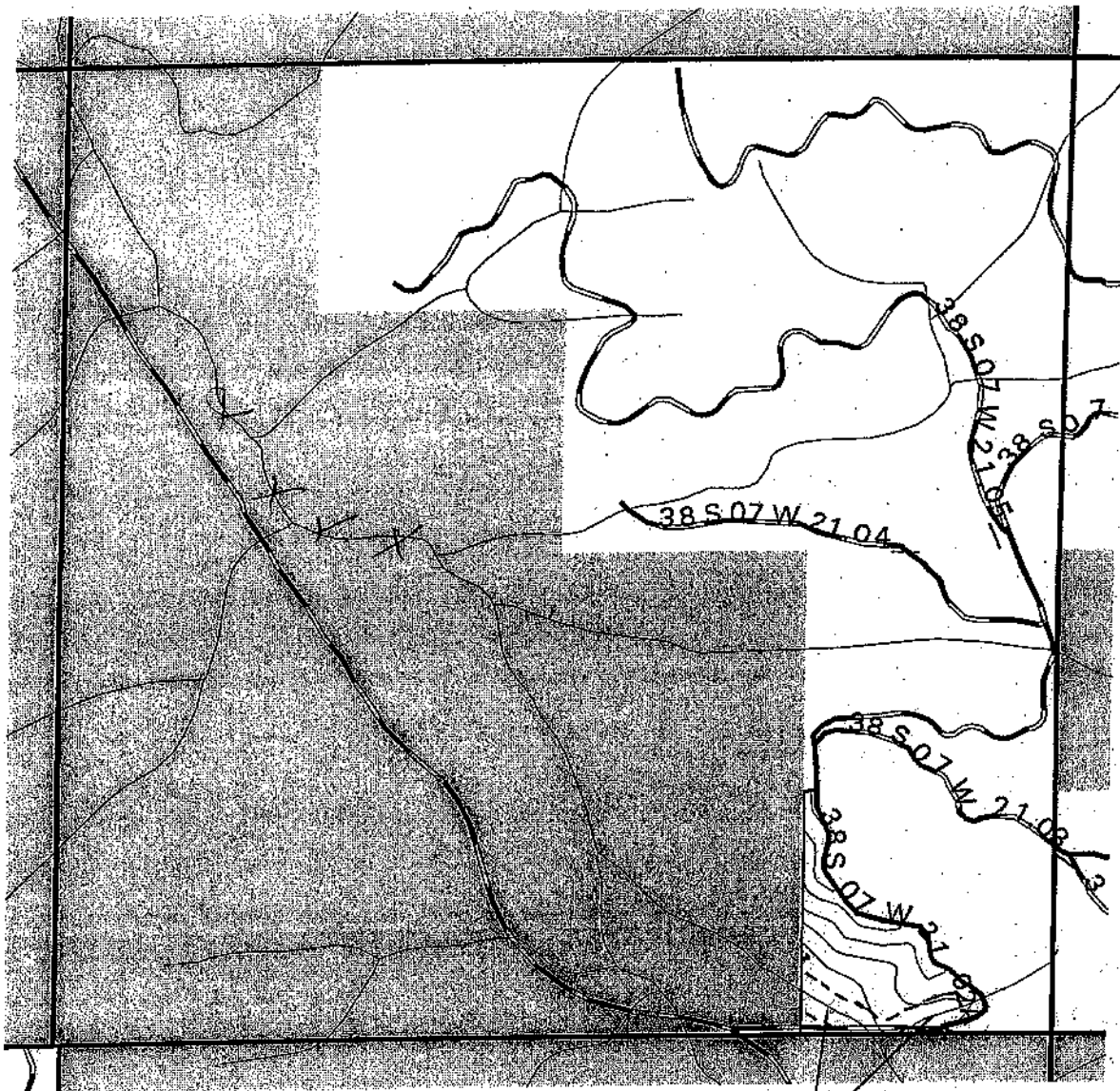
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TREATMENT AREA WITH
40' CONTOUR INTERVAL

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— SECTION LINE

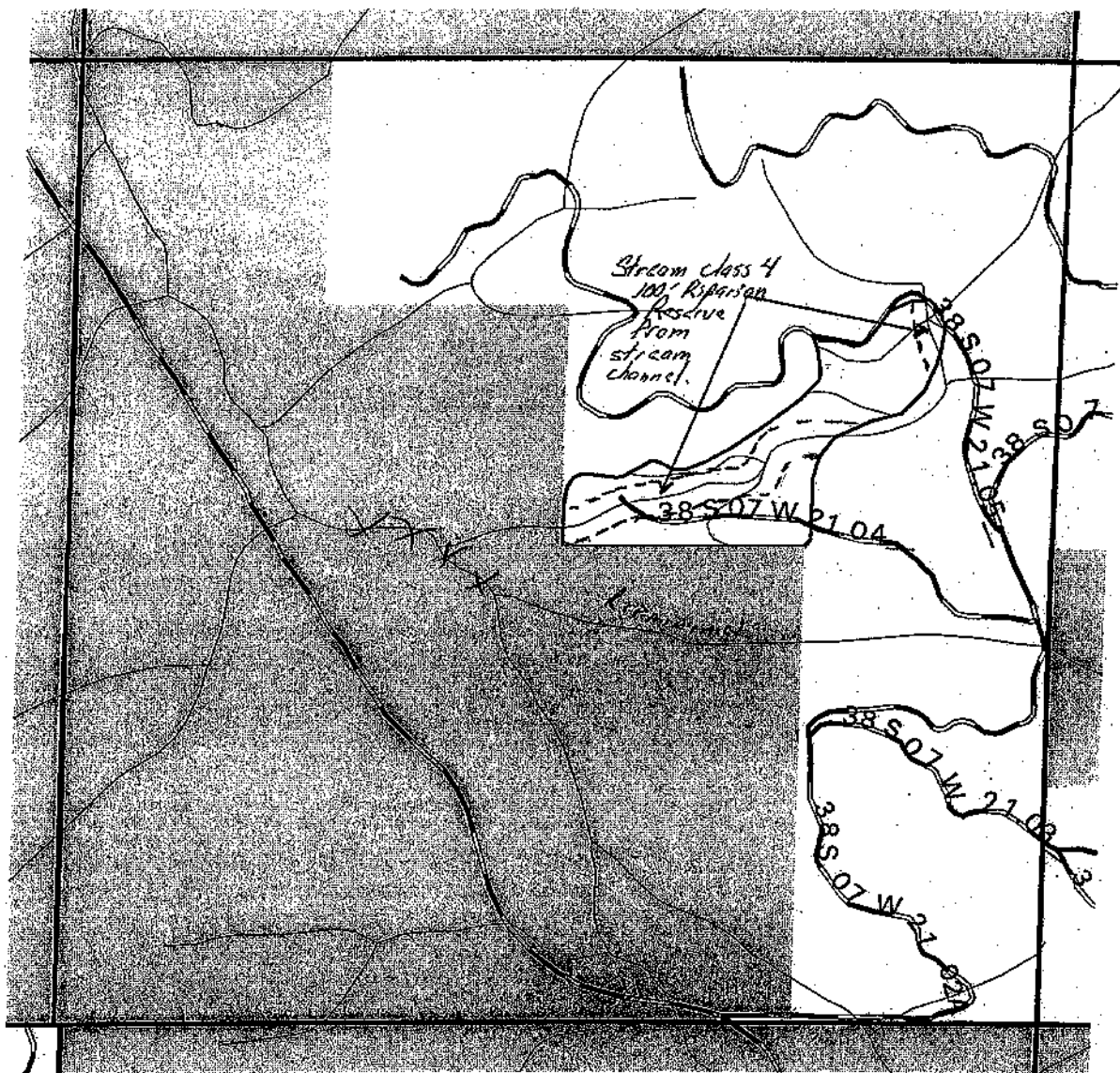
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*Stream class 4
100' Riparian
Reserve from
stream channel.*

UNIT NAME	Tall Timber 21-9
BID ITEM	
ACRES	12 (2 AC in RR)
KEY #	113310
OI #	21-4

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T38S-R7W-S21



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NON BLM LANDS



TREATMENT AREA WITH
40' CONTOUR INTERVAL

— STREAMS

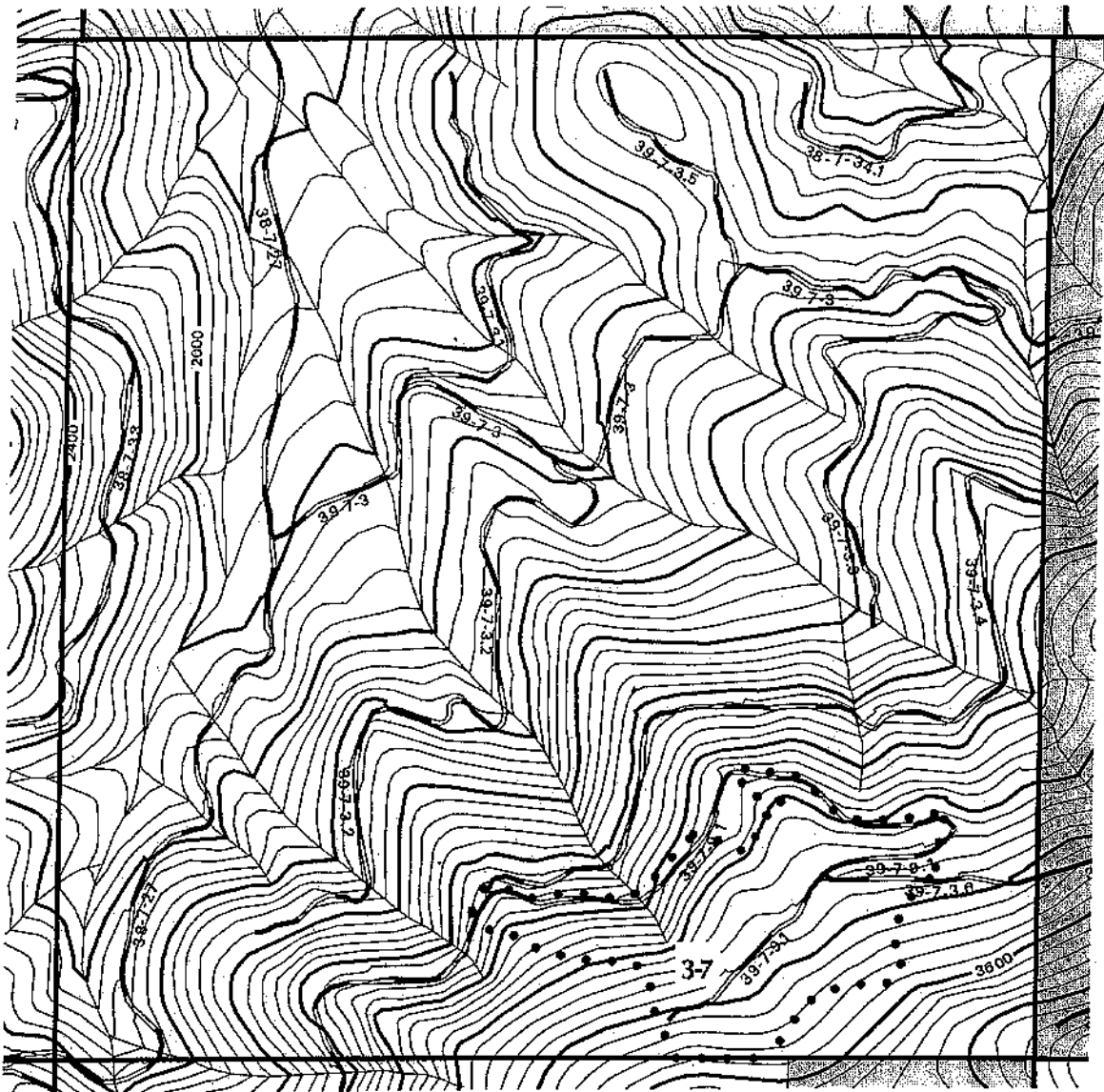
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— ROADS

UNIT NAME	Brass Monkey 7
BID ITEM	
ACRES	21 (6 AC in RR)
KEY #	113311
OI #	21-6

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T39S-R7W-S3



LEGEND



NON BLM LANDS

— STREAMS

— SECTION LINE

• • • • TREATMENT AREA

— ROADS

UNIT NAME	Thompson Creek
BID ITEM	
ACRES	44
KEY #	113493
OI #	3-7

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DRAWN _____ SCALE 1:12000

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